THE LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

THE SOCIETY OF LITHUANIAN CATHOLIC WOMEN

As stated in the historical sketch of Lithuania, the Lithuanian woman stood on equal terms with the Lithuanian man from the earliest times. It was only after the loss of Lithuanian independence that laws, forced upon the people by Russian or German occupants, tended to lower the position of women. But these foreign laws did not succeed in destroying the Lithuanian traditions or customs.

The Lithuanian woman continued to stand beside the Lithuanian man as an equal in all the affairs of the family and of the nation. She participated in Lithuanian organizations on an equal footing with men. But women do have their own specific interests. That is why Lithuanian women met in the central city of Kaunas on September 23rd and 24th, 1907, to discuss their particular affairs. There a decision was adopted to form a women's organization. The Russian occupation régime delayed the legalization of the organization until March 21st, 1908. On that day the Society of Lithuanian Catholic Women was inaugurated. The Society had a comprehensive program regarding education, social service and women's rights.

In 1910 the Society began to publish a periodical called "Lietuvaitė" (The Lithuanian Woman). It also opened a school of domestic science and several social service centers in Kaunas.

World War I, which greatly ravaged Lithuania, put an end to all public action.

After actual warfare on Lithuanian soil had slowed down, in 1917 the women resumed their activity. In 1918 they began to publish a new magazine entitled "Moterų Balsas (Women's Voice). They organized local branches of the Society, again opened schools of domestic science and also established agricultural schools for girls.

When Lithuania regained her independence, the Society spread its activities throughout the land. In 1919, the Society called a congress of women in Kaunas. In this congress the women voted to take an active part in the work for the re-establishment of the state and in all phases of civic life. When the Bolshevists, who had taken over power in Russia, tried to invade Lithuania, the Society organized all manner of aid for the recently born Lithuanian army. This help was needed because the new army lacked not only arms but food and clothing for the thousands of volunteer soldiers.

Women in Government

Women had equal political rights with men from the very beginning of the restoration of Lithuanian independence. Six Catholic women were elected to the Constituent Assembly. They immediately set to work to have the old Russian civil laws, which were prejudicial to women, abrogated. Women from different political parties were elected to subsequent parliaments. They took an active part in various parliamentary committees and vigilantly saw to it that the new laws of the land should not prejudice the rights of women in any way and that the status of the family in the social structure should be adequately safeguarded.

That the work done by women representatives was appreciated is manifested by the fact that in 1925, the president of the Society of Lithuanian Catholic Women was elected secretary-general of the parliament; in 1926, she was elected vice-president of the same body. Catholic women were active in local government, where they particularly distinguished themselves in the field of social welfare. There were Catholic women civil servants in all the ministries. A number of them achieved high rank in government service. Several repeatedly represented Lithu ania at various international conferences and at the League of Nations.